

Q: This interview is oral history number 404, and being conducted by Captain Donald Frasier, United States Naval Reserve, and Mr. Burl Berlingame [ph?] in support of the National Park Service and the USS Arizona Memorial. We are at the Alimawhana [ph?] Hotel in Honolulu. Today's date is the 6th of December, 2001. Commencement time of the interview is approximately 9:30. We are interviewing Mr. Will Sheldon Lehner. Is that the right pronunciation?

Will S. Lehner: Well yeah, I- I prefer it Will S.

Q: Will S. Lehner, who was a Fireman Third Class aboard USS Ward DD 139 on December 7th, 1941. Will for the record, please state your full name, place of birth, and your birth date.

Will S. Lehner: Will S. Lehner of uh.. 433 McDill [ph?] Avenue, Stevens Point, Wisconsin. I was born in Saint Paul, Minnesota, July 19th, 1921.

Q: And what did you consider to be your home town in 1941?

Will S. Lehner: Uh.. Saint Paul was my home town. Uh.. uhm.. joined the- joined the Naval Reserve there and we were called to active duty out of Saint Paul so that was my home.

Q: What were your parents' names?

Will S. Lehner: Uh.. my dad's name was Joseph. My mother's name was Irma. And uh.. they were living at the time I left. I le- I left in 1940 uh.. called up by the Reserves uh.. to come out to San Diego to put the USS Ward back in commission. And that's the time to leave Minnesota in January. It was about 29 below, and uh.. I had never been out to the west coast so coming out there, I remember we came on the old Sioux Line and uh.. must have taken three or four days to get out there, and when we got into California, we were go- co- going along quite slow, and the guys were had the windows open and whenever we'd go by an orange tree we'd grab an orange. And it was uh.. something for a kid to uh.. really see that was different from Minnesota. Really had a good time.

Q: I should say. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Will S. Lehner: I had one sister, Dorothy, and she's deceased right now. Mother and Dad are both deceased.

Q: Where did you go to high school, Sir?

Will S. Lehner: Uh.. I went to Johnson. I graduated from Johnson High School. And uh.. then figured I get in the Navy and see the world. I joined the Reserves when I was 17. Uh.. hopefully uh.. to get called, but it was fun. In the summertime we'd go on cruises on the Great Lakes. We'd either go up to Duluth, Minnesota and catch an old gun boat to Wilmington, and uh.. or the Willamette, either one of those two, and cruise through the Great Lakes down to Chicago and- and catch the- it was a two-week cruise. After that we'd go back to Saint Paul and maybe the next year we might go to Chicago and catch the boat down there and- and end up in Duluth. It was uh.. good- good training, and a good uh.. more or less a vacation on the Great Lakes. We even got paid for it back then. And that was in 1938 when times were tough. And uh.. I guess my buddy and I both went to school together. We both joined the Reserves for that reason. We could get a couple extra bucks. Uh.. I never regret it.

Q: Was this the same group that reported to San Diego and to put the Ward into commission?

Will S. Lehner: That's correct, yeah. Forty- Forty-seventh Division of uh.. Naval Reserve, and uh.. we got into San Diego and then we were living in naval housing for a while, while we were putting the Ward back in commission. And uh.. finally got her put back in commission and took her out on a shakedown cruise and everything seemed to be okay and- and they said "Well, your next duty is uh.. Hawaiian Islands and we thought boy this is great duty. And- and I understand that at that time anyone that could get duty in the Hawaiian Islands was getting choice duty. Uh.. it's a lot different today, I guess, but uh.. we had- we had great duty. We came over here but uh.. we hit a big storm uh.. out of San Francisco. Went and uh.. we were in Mare Island and then up to San Francisco and then we left from there. And I think it took us about nine days to get over here. And uh.. at that time I think a lot of the fellows thought hey, maybe we won't make it. But we did. It was rough weather and we made it, but it took us nine days. And uh.. I think our Skipper was uh.. Hunter Wood if I recall correctly. Uhm.. he was a good

Skipper. We got over here to Hawaii and uh.. we were attached to the uh.. Hawaiian Sea Frontier. There were four destroyers, the Allen [ph?], the Chew [ph?], the Schlie [ph?], and the Ward. And uh.. we had uh.. our duty was to patrol the entrance to the harbor between our uh.. Barber's [ph?] Point and towards Honolulu Harbor. And uh.. we take it one week at a time. Each ship would take one week. And we'd go out on Saturday morning about seven o'clock in the morning, and that was our duty for the rest of the week, and uh.. we'd go back and forth patrolling the entrance uh.. five or six knots is all we did, and finally uhm.. after the week was over one of the ships would relieve us and we'd come back in and uh.. that next week we may go out with the fleet and do maneuvers, target practice, uh.. shooting at the uh.. floating raft with a target, and uh.. after a week out with maneuvers we may be depth charging and such, different things that we would do with the fleet. It was practice and uh.. then after that we'd come in and maybe we'd be alongside the dock for a week, and uh.. maybe scri- scrape, paint or get the ship in ship-shape, and then uh.. the other week we may be able to go to visit one of the other islands, so, we had good duty out here and I really enjoyed it. And uh.. of course for a young kid, you know being out here and still get paid \$21 dollars a month, that was good money. But uh.. that- that didn't last too long, well.

Q: About when did Ward get to the Hawaiian waters?

Will S. Lehner: Uh.. I think it was around uh.. first pa- the first part of '41 I think it was. Uh.. I think it was February, February of '41 if- if I recall correctly. It may have been before that. Sixty years ago is a long time.

Q: I understand. I was just trying to gauge-

Will S. Lehner: Yeah, yeah.

Q: How much time you-

Will S. Lehner: Yeah.

Q: Enjoyed, were able to enjoy peacetime.

Will S. Lehner: We had a- we had about a year, almost a year but uh..

Q: In the training in the practicing anti-submarine warfare and so forth, it sounds like you were ready to do what Ward eventually ended up doing. What was the sense for the state of affairs? Was Japan known to be the potential enemy?

Will S. Lehner: I think- I think- I think we all knew that we were- we were kind of prepared, and if I recall correctly, I think it was around July uh.. of '41 that we were carrying ready ammunition, and uh.. I think we- we kind of anticipated something coming up then. Uh.. we never knew when or where or what, but uh.. we kind of figured that we would be in war at one time, and uh.. we didn't know how soon it would be, but we were prepared. We had a good gun crews- we had good gun crews, and we prepared well for it. And the Skipper- Skipper taught us well and uh.. the officers taught us well, so I think we were- we were a good crew, and uh.. it showed later on uh.. when we were called to action, but uh.. it was- it was a tight-knit crew. On a four-stacker, everyone knew everyone, and uh.. you get to be one big family. You're all working for the other one. And uh.. I think that's- that's really what counted and that's what kept us afloat as long as we were.

Q: I'm wondering if you could share your memory of the time immediately before that weekend. What-- you had gotten underway on Saturday? Is that-

Will S. Lehner: We gotten- we'd gotten underway Saturday morning, uhm.. I don't remember too much prior to that, other than the fact that we had a new Skipper coming aboard. He came aboard the fifth of December, and uh.. we didn't know anything about him. We had heard different stories about him, and this was WW Otterbridge [ph?] and uh.. we called him "Bill" after the war, we got to know him, and uh.. it was always "Captain" then. But uh.. we understood that he was coming from uh.. China and this was his first command, and uh.. we didn't know what kind of a captain he was gonna be. And uh.. of course, when we went out we found out. Uh.. Sunday morning December seventh at three o'clock in the morning, we went to General Quarters, and we all thought right then, this guy is gonna be a tough guy. At three o'clock in the morning we were going to General Quarters, and we're going to be practicing already. Here's a Skipper that just came aboard two or three days ago, and he's gonna drill us already. But we didn't know what was going on then, and uh.. about an hour or forty-five minutes, maybe it was less than that, he secured General Quarters. Go back to sleep. And uh.. then about six o'clock in the morning we got General Quarters again. We thought boy, this guy is tough because he's calling General Quarters at three o'clock and now it's six o'clock, we're going back to General Quarters again. But then

we found out what was happening. They had spotted a submarine, unidentified submarine. We didn't know whose submarine it was. First report was a periscope in the water, and uh.. uh.. Ray being I think one of our lookout and had spotted something, and they had said one of the- one of the s- uh.. fellows up on the bridge says "I don't know what it is but it's- it looked like a buoy to me but it's moving and I never saw anything move like that before." And uh.. then as happened uh.. the- the submarine came up more and you could see the conning tower and then we knew it was a submarine, but it was a small s- small submarine. It was one of those mini-sub. Well then the Skipper says "It's not supposed to be here. It's in restricted waters," and so he ordered number one gun to fire on it. And I didn't know this until later when we talked to the Skipper as we had reunions years later, and he was retired from the Navy, and uh.. he said uh.. "At first I thought I should ram it, but then if I ram it maybe I'll ruin my ship and this is my first command." So he says "We'll fire on it." So they fired on it with number one gun. Number one just missed it and so number three gun was the next one to fire on it because it was out of range for the number one, so and uh.. I don't think we were hundred yards or maybe more from it when they fired on it with number three gun. And number three gun hit it between the conning tower and the hull. And I was aft and I saw this and- and uh.. I was- I was ammunition handler at that time. And I'd had nothing to do but to just wait and get ammunition from below, and uh.. I saw it as uh.. we were as it was going down I saw it and I thought boy, that's a funny looking thing it had- looked like it had moss on it and uh.. and uh.. green stuff growing on it, and as we were going by we were probably 25 to 50 feet away from it when I saw it going down. We ran over it with depth charges and we dropped four depth charges on it. And uh.. then we didn't know what was going on, nothing. This was quarter to seven Sunday morning, December seventh. And so we continued on after we dropped the depth charges. We saw debris come up from the- from the uh.. explosion not knowing what it was, and of course then about shortly after that we saw a uh.. sampan, Japanese sampan and the Skipper says we'd better go and investigate and see what that's doing in restricted waters. So we went over to the sampan and that was over towards Barber's Point, and uh.. went over and they from the bridge they said that we wanted to know what they were doing over there, and none of them could understand what we were talking about. And the Skipper "Well, get a boarding party and we'll get a boarding party, we'll come aboard." And we went aboard- we were ready to go aboard, and then someone came from below and uh.. he could speak very good English and he said "What is it, Captain?" And we said we wanted to know what you were doing over there, and uh.. we want you to proceed to Honolulu Harbor, and in the meantime we called the Coast Guard. And the Coast Guard was gonna come out and pick up them and we would follow them over towards Honolulu Harbor. Well, in

the meantime we were following this sampan, and in the meantime uh.. we notice over towards Pearl Harbor that there was a lot of planes diving and smoke erupting. And we thought well, this Army, Air Force is practicing again, but why are they practicing on a Sunday morning? We had never seen them practice like that. And we had never seen all the smoke and- and fire and that before. We didn't know what was going on, and uh.. shortly after that uh.. two planes came over us and they dropped bombs on each side of us and uh.. they- they weren't more than 100 feet from us and, and I could see the pilot in one of them looking at me as he dove- dove down and dropped the bomb on each side of us. Didn't hit us, and uh.. we could see then the red marking, the big meatball, and then we knew it was Japanese, and then we knew that all the commotion over there must have been these planes but because it came from that direction. Uh.. we didn't know the destruction in Pearl Harbor at that time, because we were out at sea. We were at the entrance, but uh.. we did find out later on about one o'clock in the afternoon. We had to go in and get more ammunition. We were out of depth charges. We had sound contacts one after another that we were dropping depth charges on. We don't know if there were submarines or what they were, but anyway, we were dropping depth charges, and uh.. we had a- we had a good well-trained crew and uh.. I suppose they figured that if it's a submarine down there, we'll get it, because we saw one submarine already, so I suppose that's the reason we were dropping all the depth charges. But we didn't know really the destruction until we got in there about one o'clock in the afternoon, and then we saw it. And we didn't see everything, because we went to the ammunition dump to pick up more depth charges, and uh.. that's when we saw that the burning and the- the ships were burning and the fire and the- and the water and the oil on the water and uh.. oil burning, and some of the- uh.. people in the water. And it was mass destruction, really uh.. I think back at it now and I'm glad in a way that we didn't go all the way in there. Of course we didn't see the really the bad destruction until a week later when we went in to after we were re- relieved, and they had a lot of the bodies out of the water then. Uh.. it was something that I hope that I never have to see again.

Q: Your battle station was as an ammunition handler and you were topside?

Will S. Lehner: I was topside aft, yeah. Uh.. but uh.. that was my job at that time. Later, later I was uh.. First Shellman uh.. after we were converted to a fast transport, APD I was First Shellman on the number four gun, and that was a three inch fifty, and uh.. that was my job all the time, but then I was a cook. I was later a uh.. uh.. cook on the ship and I was a cook until she went down uh..

Q: Initially you said the crew didn't realize what was going on. I'm trying to understand when you went to General Quarters the second time or when you began firing on the submarine. When did it become apparent that this was-

Will S. Lehner: Well I think-

Q: Real combat?

Will S. Lehner: I- I think it became apparent when they dropped bombs on each side of us. That became apparent then, and when we saw the planes that they were Japanese planes, then we knew that we were at war, and uh.. uh.. we didn't know how bad the destruction was in Pearl Harbor either at that time, but we knew we were at war when they were dropping bombs around us. When they were trying to get us, we knew that, we knew that we were at war, and uh.. the g- the guys were ready then. And uh.. I think we were all ready. We were young kids then, you know, and uh.. if uh.. anyone knows I- I had my family grow up, and I know my kid was from 17 or 18 on, he had a fear of nothing, and I think that we were the same at that time. Uh.. we had no fear of anything. In fact I thought after that happened, hey, this is great, because now I got something to write home about. Because uh.. we were there for that year and nothing happening, and uh.. there was a routine. "Well, we went out to this island, we went out to that island. We had gunnery practice this week," or you know. But then, "Hey we sunk a submarine this morning!" But I f- I didn't realize then that I couldn't write home and tell them that. But uh.. we were ready for action the, the crew was ready, and I'm- I- I'm really think that the whole crew was ready. Uh.. they were ready for any action they could get into. Uh.. of course three years later uh.. some of them weren't ready, and I wasn't ready anymore. We had three years of plenty of action and we were burnt out. But uh.. never forget when we got sunk. One of the uh.. signalmen was laying uh.. on the after deckhouse and uh.. Japanese planes were coming down on us, or they were flying over us, and uh.. we were behind the Jap lines and as they flew over he says "Hey, drop one here so we can get home." But he didn't really- really mean it, but uh.. that's really what happened later on. Uh.. uh.. but when were k- when we were young and kids we had a lot of spunk and uh.. we were a well-trained crew and uh.. we did- we did our job.

Q: I'll ask you a few questions.

Will S. Lehner: Sure.

Q: In your training while patrolling the exclusion zone in the Sea Frontier, what were you primarily looking for, submarines or sampans or both?

Will S. Lehner: Any- any- anything in restricted waters. There were supposed to be no boats in there, huh.. no submarines, no sampans. Anything that was in this area was supposedly restricted and not to be in that area, so this submarine was in restricted water, and uh.. the sampan was in restricted waters, and those were one of the things that were not supposed to be there. That's what the Skipper said. "Hey, this is not supposed to be there." And how do you- how do you tell a submarine to get out of there but to sink it. I guess that's what the Skipper figured. Uh..

Q: Had you had any trouble with sampans before?

Will S. Lehner: Never, never- never had seen any sampans in that area, so uh.. this was something unusual too, and I think the Skipper figured that maybe this was uh.. had to do something with the submarine because it was on surface, but uh.. we didn't realize or learn until later that this submarine itself was having problems, and uh.. that's the reason it had to come up to the surface. It had problems with his compass or whatever it was. Uh.. I didn't reali- I didn't find that out until last year I was back here and- and uh.. uh.. we had a Japanese from one of the mother subs that brought five of these mini-subs over here, that uh.. he said that this one was having problems and that's the reason that it had to come to the surface so uh..

Q: Was it following Anteries [ph?]??

Will S. Lehner: Well it was trying to get over towards the Anteris. The Anteris was- was waiting with a toll to come in, and uh.. that's what it was-- and we figured that hey, maybe that's gonna try and sink that sh- that uh.. Anteris when he gets in the harbor or gets in the entrance, and uh.. if it sinks at getting in the entrance, it will block up the entrance. It won't be able to-- nothing will be able to get in or out, and we didn't know why it would want to sink it there, but uh.. hey, you never know what it's doing there, so.

Q: There was a PBY involved in the event too. Can you tell us about that?

Will S. Lehner: Yeah, that PBY was there shortly after the first uh.. General Quarters and uh.. that one dropped a smoke bomb, I think it was a smoke

bomb, that dropped at the second- at the second General Quarters and more or less spotted it for us. See the first time they understand that they had spotted this submarine, but our Skipper didn't see it. And that's the reason we secured from General Quarters. And then afterwards then the PBY dropped that smoke bomb for us, and then more or less showed us where it was. And uh.. we thought this one was coming in from dawn patrol and that's- that's what I learned later on that it was coming in from dawn patrol.

Q: Where was the Skipper's cabin in relation to the bridge?

Will S. Lehner: Uh.. right below the bridge. Right below the bridge. The Skipper uh.. and uh.. in fact later on- later on we had a Skipper that when we went to General Quarters that one time he come out of his quarters go on the bridge, and his life jacket caught on one of the dogs [ph?] and he couldn't get- get loose, and it was quite a- quite a joke with the crew that he would "Let go! Let go! Let go!" I won't say his name but it wasn't WW Otterbridge because he was a good Skipper. Uh..

Q: We're going to pause and switch the tapes.

<break in recording>

Q: Okay this is tape two. Interview with fireman Will Lehner. The Captain's cabin in relation to the bridge, how quickly could he get up there and do you remember what Otterbridge was wearing that day?

Will S. Lehner: No I don't, no. I was back aft so I didn't see but- but uh.. knowing- knowing Captain uh.. as he was later found out- as I later found out and to be he was ready. He was ready at all times, and he was a wonderful, wonderful Skipper. Uh.. I wish we could have had him right to the end, but uh.. he- he went on to bigger and better things. Uh.. it probably took him uh.. two, three, I think at my age, at that time I could have got up there in a couple seconds. Uh.. it wasn't very far up on the bridge. Uh.. and I'm sure that he was plenty spry, so uh.. he was up there right away, I'm sure.

Q: You got a good close look at the submarine?

Will S. Lehner: I did, I did.

Q: Do you remember exactly where the shell struck?

Will S. Lehner: Well if I- if I recall correctly it struck uh.. just below the conning tower just right on- on uh.. part of the hull, part of the hull in the bottom of the conning tower. That's what it looked like to me. And as it was going down and I thought that it was quite unusual that it was a green mossy colored and uh.. I had never seen anything like that before, and of course uh.. later I found out the reason for that had been at sea, and uh.. I didn't know that they were brought over by mother subs, but I thought that it had been at sea all the time you know, under its own power, but later learned that it was electric powered, and battery powered, so and uh.. I learned a lot about it last year when *National Geographic* took me over to look for the- the Ward, and uh.. we had uh.. uhm.. radiomen from one of the mother subs that was aboard with us, Kichidowa [ph?] was his name, and uh.. he told us all about it, how they brought him over there and they didn't come with the fleet. They took the short route, and uh.. how they uh.. released the subs the night before December 7th, and then they went out on the outskirts and waited for the mini-subs to do their job and then come back to the mother subs and they were to retrieve them and then take them back. But uh.. that was all very interesting and I never knew that uh.. until last year, so but uh.. quite an experience.

Q: When you depth charged the sub you say you brought up some debris?

Will S. Lehner: Yeah, I saw something come up but you never know if it was from the submarine or if it was from the bottom or what it was, but uh.. then I later learned that uh.. Skipper said it was about 1200 feet, uh.. but I don't remember what the debris was but I saw something- something come on up.

Q: Both depth chargers went off?

Will S. Lehner: Yeah, well we dropped four- four depth charges yeah.

Q: Had you had any trouble with the depth charges prior to that?

Will S. Lehner: None, none at all, no. And we had practiced that too before. And uh.. and we had practiced with our torpedoes. Of course we had four torpedo tubes, triple torpedo tubes. And uh.. we had been practicing with the

fleet with those and uh.. so we were pretty well- pretty well uh.. educated, you might say.

Q: Had you had any excuse to drop depth charges prior on suspected contacts?

Will S. Lehner: Oh. yes. And-

Q: Were you guys looking for submarines and depth charging prior to?

Will S. Lehner: Oh yeah. In fact one time we- we got a lot of fish aboard. We depth charged a bunch of fish, school of fish. The Skipper says "Well, we got all those fish there. Why don't we go down and haul them in." So we- we took some of the fish. I don't remember what kind they were but we had fish on the menu and uh.. I guess it was a big school of fish that they- they sounded and thought it was a sub or some kind of a contact and- and uh.. dropped depth charges on it and that's what came up.

Q: The Coast Guard sent out a small cutter, the Tiger.

Will S. Lehner: Yeah.

Q: To deal with the sampan.

Will S. Lehner: Yeah.

Q: And Tiger was strafed as it was coming.

Will S. Lehner: I didn't- I didn't know that, yeah.

Q: And it may have been the first ship actually fired on during the attack.

Will S. Lehner: Yeah.

Q: Did Tiger take sampan from you guys? Or what happened?

Will S. Lehner: It must have been because uh.. about that time I know these- this- these two planes came over us and uh.. uh.. I remember at that time I don't remember what happened to the sampan, and uh.. I guess we were more or less uh.. at action then. Uh.. because I don't remember what happened to the sampan, where it went or uh.. if the Coast Guard had taken it over or what happened. Uh.. we kind of lost track of all that.

Q: What happened to the Ward during the rest of the day? You guys went in for ammunition. Were you patrolling the sea frontier? Did the send you elsewhere?

Will S. Lehner: Yeah, we were, we were patrolling the sea frontier, our usual patrol back and forth all day long, and then that night we patrolled and uh.. we kind of thought that uh.. maybe they would have a landing force coming in and uh.. we didn't know what we were gonna do if a big landing force came in because we were an old four-stacker with a four inch guns, but uh.. I guess we were prepared. We'll do what we have to do and uh.. thank God nothing happened that night. Uh.. we did fire on some of our planes coming in later that morning, uh.. the V-17s were coming in. We fired at those and we weren't as good a shot at the planes as we were the submarine, but they were a little higher up and farther away from us. And when the planes came in that night, we did not fire at them. And uh.. I know some of the- some of the planes from the enterprise came in that night and I heard later on that they were fired on and I guess two or three of them got knocked down. We didn't fire on them because uh.. we had ha- we had uh.. been told that some of our planes might be coming in, so-

Q: Japanese submarines were in Hawaiian waters for a month following the attack. Did you have any further contacts?

Will S. Lehner: Yeah we did. We had a lot of contacts and uh.. supposedly, supposedly we had gotten a bigger submarine later on, around January they thought that we had gotten a bigger submarine, but uh.. we're not- we're not really sure. But we had a lot of sub contacts. We had a lot of sub contacts. And we dr- dropped a lot of depth charges uh.. back and forth on our patrols so.

Q: Were you joined by other destroyers?

Will S. Lehner: Yeah, yeah. Uh.. I don't remember which ones, but uh.. it seems that we had help out there. -ones, but uh.. it seems that we had help out there. Uh.. but there wasn't any action going on other than the submarines, and uh.. uh.. I don't remember any- any planes coming over after that. It was kind of a quiet deal.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about living on a four stacker; it was really essentially a World War I design, a fast attack destroyer?

Will S. Lehner: Well it wasn't that bad. Of course close quarters, it was close quarters. We had our lockers down below and uh.. then we had a bunk right above that, and we had two more bunks above that. We had three bunks and uh.. it was uh.. kind of tight quarters. You had to slip in sideways and uh.. you didn't have a chance to roll around, but uh.. and uh.. destroyer uh.. sailor is something different because uh.. it's kind of rough- rough riding and uh.. you get- you get used to it after your aboard a destroyer for a while, and uh.. the old four stack- four stack tin can sailors are considered kind of the tough ones. They could take it, and uh.. we always considered ourselves the tough ones because we uh.. we could stand the seas and we could go through anything and uh.. luckily I'll say I never got seasick, but I saw some of the guys that used to get so seasick. Uh.. we had one First Class Water Tender that the minute the- the uh.. whistled uh.. piped uh.. special sea details, he'd go down in the rag locker in uh.. in the- in the boiler room and uh.. stay there because he would get so seasick and we had uh.. a seaman that got so seasick that uh.. he would turn green I would say. And he was later transferred off because he just couldn't take it but uh.. later on I got to be a cook and uh.. and uh.. I got to work with the greasy foods and all that and it never bothered me. And I think the Great Lakes, I'd been on the Great Lakes fishing after I got discharged from the Navy and I've been in some rough water in the Great Lakes and I think that's tougher than some of the- some of the Pacific. But of course we did go through a couple typhoons and- and uh.. uh.. had- had our ready locker ripped right off the deck, pulled it right off the deck. We were down the South China Seas and uh.. I thought we were gonna go under a couple times but I never got sick. I don't know why, and uh.. I don't know if I should try it now but I did. I tried it last year when I went out on that seagoing tug and we were rolling pretty good with uh.. going about four knots and getting some of those swells, and never bothered me a bit yet, so I guess I'm just the lucky one.

Q: Tell us a little bit about going back out to the area with *National Geographic*. Were they searching the right areas? Did they do their research?

Will S. Lehner: I hate to say this but I don't think they were searching the right areas because Russ Reets [ph?] who was with me at the time, he was aboard the- the Ward in December 7th, at December 7th and he was topside, and he and I both thought that we were in the wrong area, and we told uh.. Dr. Ballard, Bob Ballard that uh.. we thought that we were in the wrong area at the time, and he said "Oh no," he says "I got this all from the Park Service so I know just about where it is." And uh.. unfortunately we were there for uh.. 14 days and we never found it, and uh.. I thought we were in closer to the- to the harbor, and uh.. Russ and I both said that, and uh.. Dr. Ballard said that he had more information than we did, and of course being 60 years ago uh.. maybe our minds were playing tricks on us. But uh.. we didn't have that information from the Park Service that he said he had, so we took his word for it and uh.. but we never found it. I wished we could go back and look for it again because uh.. uh.. that was almost a closing for me uh.. if we would have found it. Uh.. it would have been a closing for knowing that it went down, and then being able to come back and finding it after 60 years, that would have been-

Q: So it sounds like you have a pretty vivid image of it when you saw it, I mean you've remembered it all these years pretty clearly.

Will S. Lehner: Yeah.

Q: How does that come back to you?

Will S. Lehner: Well I can- I can still if I close my eyes, I can still see it as it- as it was going down, and uh.. I don't know why. If I- if I got a good memory or what, but uh.. it brings back that day, that day and that's one of the more important things that I remember. And uh.. uh.. and then seeing the planes of course. And of course after that there were a lot of other things that uh.. in my war experience that I can remember clearly, just as I remember seeing that sub.

Q: Does it seem to be the most vivid period of your life?

Will S. Lehner: One of them, yeah, but I think the next one was probably the most vivid is when the Kamikaze was coming down on us.

Q: Yeah, can you some sort of summarize what happened to the Ward after Pearl Harbor up until-

Will S. Lehner: Yeah, well we were-

Q: Two years later when it was sunk on December 7th and what happened that day?

Will S. Lehner: Yeah, well three years- three years to the day later, but we were- we were- we were sent after we were made into a fast transport. An APD, they took off the torpedo tubes, put on landing craft, uh.. took off the four-inch guns and put on three-inch dual purpose. Put on 20 millimeters, and uh.. made us a fast transport where we took out the forward fire room, made a troop space out of that, and we would haul marines, rangers, uh.. even- we even hel- uh.. used to haul natives over in the islands. We were over in Guadalcanal, from Guadalcanal all through the Solomons we were working hauling troops, and uh.. we had Jimmy Roosevelt's Fourth Marine Raiders I think they were. We- we hauled them up into Munda [ph?] uh.. for the airfield, and a week later we went back and pulled them out of there, brought them back to Guadalcanal for rest and recreation for a week aboard ship. Then we took after the Solomons was secured, uh.. we went over to New Guinea. We started from Boona [ph?] and went all through New Guinea and the uh.. British Ar- Arch- Archipelagos landed there cl- G- Gloucester I think was one of them and- and uh.. then went on to through New Guinea and uh.. finally went into the Philippines. We went into the Philippines and we landed uh.. Army Rangers at Dinegat [ph?] uh.. an island just off of Laiti [ph?] and uh.. got the- got the forces there, and then we were with the mine sweepers and they swept mines for three days before the big force came in, and we exploded mines, and uh.. then went back to New Guinea and picked up more troops and then went back to Laiti after the big landing. And then we were attached to Laiti and operating out of Laiti. Prior to that we were operating out of Hilandia [ph?]. And uh.. then our I- last landing was to be in Ormak [ph?] Bay and we were- what had happened as our forces were being cut off, our army forces there, and we were to land troops behind the Japs and cut them off so that the Japs were in between the forces we were landing and the forces that we had there. We went in there in Ormak Bay in December seventh. We le- we left uh.. Hilan-- or we left Laiti the 6th of December 1943, and then went up and of course the Japanese float planes were following us all the way up and they would come in and go out and come in and go out, and watching our-- but we landed the troops at uh.. probably 9:00 or 9:30 in the morning. And uh.. behind uh.. uh.. Jap lines in Ormak Bay. About the

same time, we didn't know this but the Japanese were landing reinforcements. And uh.. that was a time when major bomb was at his peak, and the P-38s were flying around there and- and the Japanese were flying around there and they were dog fighting and uh.. it was really uh.. really a sight to see. But uh.. then uh.. we saw some planes come over us and they flew over us first, and when they flew over us our signalman, Don Peppin [ph?] was laying on the deck. He had after steering control, and uh.. he saw these planes fly over us and he motioned to the planes hey, drop one here, uh.. figuring if we got sunk then we could get back to the States because we had been out there for three, almost three years, you know. And uh.. finally uh.. they went around and dropped the bombs over on the beach, and after they had dropped the bombs on the beach they came around and uh.. they started picking targets and uh.. one of the other destroyers we could see was about a mile away, uh.. took a hit from a suicide ch- ch- Kamikaze and then the broke off and three of them started towards us and I was number one loader on number four gun, and I was throwing shells into that gun and he was coming right down towards the aft end of the ship and, god, he was coming right down and we were shooting him and the- and the shells seemed to be going right through the wings and he just kept coming closer and closer and closer. And- and uh.. I learned later on that what they try to do is they try and skim the back of the ship and skid along the top and try as get as many people in the- on top side as they can. Well, luckily the skipper was zigging and zagging and zigging and zagging so we took one in the on the side, right in the troop space, and uh.. the plane exploded and fire was all over the ship or in the forward part of the ship, and uh.. the ammunition started in the ammunition locker started burning and uh.. ammunition started exploding and uh.. that's when uh.. the skipper uh.. uh.. Farwell [ph?], Dick Farwell was our skipper then, and he had been uh.. uh.. exec before when Otterbridge was on he was aboard ship, and uh.. he was Captain then and he was a good captain, and uh.. he said "Abandon ship, we can't save it." They tried to save it and they couldn't put the- we didn't have any pressure. The uh.. fire room was out and uh.. and uh.. everything was burning and so we had to abandon ship. Well I rather than jump overboard right away, uh.. two weeks prior to that, two guys had fallen overboard when we were going back to the- to uh.. Hilandia and uh.. by the time we had turned around uh.. what had happened that they were sitting on the life line and uh.. lifeline broke and two of them went over and uh.. by the time they got to the second one, a shark had him and was taking him down. And I said uh.. when- when we were going got hit there, I says "I'm not gonna jump in the water. The Japs didn't get me yet, and I'm not gonna let a shark get me." So I said "I'll wait. There will be plenty of boats alongside." The ship was burning and some of the ammunition was exploding but I said "I'll take my chances." And I waited and a boat came alongside and uh.. I walked down the rope ladder and never got my feet wet

and never got wet at all, and they took me to another destroyer uh.. that was alongside and then we learned- learned later that uh.. Bill Outerbridge was on the O'Brian [ph?] and uh.. he got orders to finally fire up on the Ward and sink it. They couldn't save it so rather than leave it there they had to sink it, and Bill O'Brian, uh.. WW Otterbridge had the uh.. uh.. honor or dishonor whatever you might say, uh.. of sinking his first command. And later on in years he used to visit us in Saint Paul and he said "That's the hardest thing I ever had to do was sink the Ward because that was my first command." But uh.. uh.. he was good and good s- good skipper. And of course he took uh.. Dick Farwell aboard the O'Brian and uh.. Dick says he didn't realize it until after he got on the O'Brian that he left his billfold with all his money aboard ship, and he said- and another thing the guy says "Yeah, and we had 350 cases of beer in the paint locker and that all went down so we didn't get to drink the beer." So uh.. there was a lot of stuff that was lost and everything that I had was lost and uh.. uh.. I got off with my helmet and uh.. and my life jacket and that- and the clothes I had on, and so uh.. then we were taken back to Laiti, and uh.. at Laiti they got us all together and uh.. took us back to uh.. uh.. Hilandia and then from Hilandia they give us new clothes, and then from Hilandia they sent us all back to the States on uh.. uh.. one of the Manson [ph?] liners. And we went back unescorted uh.. from Hilandia. Uh.. I think it took us about seven or eight days, I don't remember how long but I know we had two meals a day on that ship. And one meal was uh.. a hard boiled egg in the morning and uh.. whatever potato or something at- in the evening, and that's all we had for about seven days. But my being a cook uh.. I was a cook on the Ward. I knew how to get around these things so I went found the- the galley, and I got some bread and I had some onion sandwiches in between and stuff like that, so uh.. uh.. I- I got back okay.

Q: What were your emotions on losing your first ship?

Will S. Lehner: It was kind of tough. Uh.. it was just like losing your home. You know if anyone went through uh.. a fire in their home and lost- uh.. lost their home, it was just like losing your home. I had all my pictures, everything that I had collected. I had uh.. a medical uh.. Japanese medical kit that I had gotten from one of the islands that we had been on because we used to go over on the islands and have a beer party uh.. lots of times after ,you know, and uh.. that was our liberty. And uh.. I had picked up a uh.. Japanese medical kit on one of the islands and uh.. I had received a uh.. stiletto [ph?] that I had, and all that stuff was lost. And uh.. pictures that I had had form all my years and those were all lost, but uh.. uh.. I got off of it okay and uh.. I don't think that we lost anyone. There may have been one casualty then, because uh.. Woody who was an electrician was right above where the

uh.. ship went- uh.. plane went in and he was sprayed with gas, and they brought him aboard this destroyer I was on. I don't even remember what destroyer I was on, and uh.. he was aboard there. They brought him aboard and he was wrapped in a- in a sheet and he- I saw him and he was burned from head to toe, and I don't- I never found out if he survived or not. But uh.. other than that we didn't lose anyone that the sharks got. So we had a pretty good record. But we only had 14- 14 guys left from the original crew at the end. The rest had been transferred off. Uh.. and it was a good, it was a good ship and I enjoyed every minute of it I think except getting sunk. Uh.. uh.. we had some good skim- skippers and we had two of the best, Dick Farwell and WW. Otterbridge, Bill Otterbridge uhm.. uh.. Captain Otterbridge. He later, he later retired as a Vice Admiral and uh.. he used to come and visit us in Saint Paul. And he said "That was my family." He says uh.. he uh.. he brought us into a fighting crew and uh.. he thought that we were one of his kids. So uh.. and he died, he lived to be about 85 years old I think, and uh.. he died in Tifton, Georgia. And I don't know if Bill uh.. Dick Farwell is still alive. The last I heard he was in San Diego, and uh.. both good skippers. We had other guys that weren't so good. I won't say those, whose- who they were. <laughs>

Q: What did you do the rest of the war?

Will S. Lehner: Af- after the war uh.. I was- I got a medical in '45 uh.. I was sent back to uh.. uh.. Oakland Naval Hospital. I had dropped from 210 pounds to 157 pounds and so they put me back in the hospital. I was in the hospital for six and one-half months. They called it "combat fatigue" trying to build me up again. And of course, at that time in '45, this was in May of '45, they were trying to get rid of as many men as they could because uh.. the war was winding down now, and uh.. I was Chief and they wanted to get rid of as many as they could, so uh.. I took- I took a medical discharge, 50 percent medical discharge, and uh.. then I went back to Saint Paul where I lived and went back there and- and worked for a while. Then after working for a while I says I better go to school. So I went to school and uh.. trade school and took up uh.. printing and I was a printer all my life and I retired after 32 ½ years with a fishing tackle manufacturer. The Worth Company, I- I worked for them in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, and I had charge of the fr- the printing department so but I am still active. I am on the village board back home and I'm on the board of directors at the credit union, and uh.. I work with uh.. uh.. senior groups and uh.. do talks with them on Pearl Harbor and the veterans and belong to the DAV, the FVW, uh.. American Legion, and uh.. active in all of them so I still keep myself busy. I'm just a young kid, yet.

<crew talk - audio break>

Q: Okay, this is Tape 3, interview with Will Lehner. Tell us a little bit about life in Honolulu during the war. Did you have time for a girlfriend or anything?

Will S. Lehner: Oh I don't think I should re- <laughs> I shouldn't say anything about that. I had a good time. I had a good time in Honolulu. Uh.. we used to uh.. go to the YMCA and of course you'd visit all the bars and you could uh.. tour the islands and uh.. uh.. you could take a trip around the island for I think a half a buck or something like that, and uh.. uh.. we used to go on a lot of those tours. The guys would get together and they'd hire a cab and- and go around the islands and so I saw all the islands and- and uh.. when we'd go to the other islands we'd visit them and- and uhm.. we had a lot- we had a lot of fun on uh.. uh.. we could uh.. I'll never forget. We'd take a buy a six-pack of Coke and a bottle of rum, go down on the by the breakwaters at uh.. Waikiki and sit there and drink rum and Cokes and- and uh.. that was in 1940 and didn't cost very much. I don't even remember what a bottle of rum and six-pack of Coke cost that much. Probably about a nickel a- a nickel a bottle, and uh.. we'd uh.. pool our money. Of course we didn't have a lot of money then, you know. When you first went in, you went in at 21 dollars a month and uh.. uh.. then uh.. when I first got in uh.. I was Fireman Third, but I also got a job as mess cooking because I could pick up another 35 bucks or 30 bucks a month mess cooking. What you did on- on these old tin cans, is you had the galley up forward topside, and then you had the tables down below, and uh.. you'd have about 15 to 17 people on the table, and you had a mess captain at the table which is usually a First Class, and he would run that table. And what- what I would do is I would as a mess cook, I would have to run up to the galley and get the food and bring it down and then they'd put, I'd have the plates on the table, and then they'd have uh.. pots that you'd bring the food down in and put it on the table and then the mess captain would start it out at the head of the table and uh.. pass it around the table. And then at uh.. payday you got paid every two weeks, what- what he would do is he would b- set a bowl at the beginning. He would put a dollar in, and he would pass it to everyone, and everyone was supposed to put a dollar in, and that was for the mess cook, so then I could make an extra couple of bucks that way, so I- I stayed on mess cooking for quite a while because I liked it. And uh.. uh.. what I do is I go over to the commissary and I buy a bottle or so of hot sauce and I buy some pickles and I'd bake some uh.. onions with uh.. vinegar and I'd do all that extra stuff and so they liked that so that's why they'd give me a buck every- every payday and uh.. you have to work those areas a little bit too, but uh.. I liked it. I- I had fun.

Q: How did the people on the islands treat you guys and did it change after December seventh?

Will S. Lehner: They treated us well. Uh.. we never had any problem with them. In fact uh.. I had friends on the island that would invite me over and we'd have parties and- and uh.. we had a lot of fun. Uh.. a lot of beer parties and- and uh.. beer parties and uh.. luaus and we used to have a lot of fun over here. And that was great duty, you know, sitting out here. Just think, you're out here in the sunshine and- and still getting paid for it? Hey, that's great duty. <laughs> I'll take it again.

Q: If you were to close your eyes and just try to bring up an image of the war years what- what would it be?

Will S. Lehner: Of the war years here? Or?

Q: On the Ward.

Will S. Lehner: On the Ward.

Q: Yeah.

Will S. Lehner: We saw a lot of action, that's all I can say is we saw a lot of action. With landing troops every time you went on a- on a mission, you never knew if you were coming back or not because uh.. uh.. at the beginning of the war around Guadalcanal and that things were tough. I remember one air raid when uh.. there were uh.. over 120 Japanese planes in the air and they radioed to the guns all- all planes in the air are enemy planes. Pick your targets and start firing. And uh.. it was just black and uh.. we figured that never figured that we'd come out of those. And that happened for all during the Solomons. You know, things were tough in the Solomons. We didn't have many planes here. We didn't have many ships here, and uh.. uh.. it was tough and the de- and the destroyers and the APDs were uh.. targets for them. I remember we used to go over to Talagi [ph?] and uh.. we used to go up the river during the daytime and hide under the palm trees uh.. to get out of the reach of the jet planes. And then at about four o'clock or so in the afternoon we'd go load troops and then we'd head up the slot, what they called up the slot and drop- drop our troops off. And then after we might drop them off at two o'clock in the morning something like that, and then haul

back without any cover at all run back and hopefully when we get closer to Guadalcanal then we get a plane or two escort, and uh.. that happened and of course after they got Munda and some of the other ones, then we got some more airplanes, and then we had more a little more protection but prior to that it was kind of hot going, and uh.. it- it I remember we had a lot of action and uh.. I'm proud that we were able to come through it all. Uh.. I think the Ward- the Ward had a good record and... I w- I might say that I was very proud... to have served until she went down. Uh.. it was an honor. <holding back tears>

Q: Miss the ship?

Will S. Lehner: Yep... I miss- miss the ship and I miss all my- all my buddies... <clears throat> You know, we're all getting older. And- and uh.. and we're- we're all dying off so- so fast now... I've been... I've been blessed with good health so and uh.. everything, you know, and- and so many of my buddies that I see that- that are dying so soon, just uh.. last two weeks ago I called Minneapolis, some of my buddies there, Saint Paul, rather and- and uh.. and they told me that another one had gone. Jo- Jones, one of our uh.. s- uh.. he was a seaman at the time and they just had- he had just passed away and uh.. uh.. thank god I've been blessed with good health.

Q: How do you feel being here with the rest of the Pearl Harbor survivors?

Will S. Lehner: It's great. It's great, and I wish I could get a- a signature of everyone. But there's- there's so much going on, you know, in- in uh.. such a short time. I'm- I'm hoping that we could- I was hoping that we could have one next year again and every year.

Q: Time becoming precious?

Will S. Lehner: <whispers> Yep, yep. Yep, very... I guess- I guess uhm.. I guess you mellow an awful lot... Sixty years ago I- I- I- I don't think I would shed a tear. You know? But now, as I'm getting- going on 81 and uh... hopefully my health will continue and I can live five- five more years, ten more years if I'm in good health. But-

Q: How do you feel talking about the war after all these years?

Will S. Lehner: Uhm.. I don't mind it now. For many years I didn't talk about it. Uh.. it was hard for me to talk about it. Uh.. now I go around to schools. The kids- the kids today are not taught this in school. They don't know anything about it. I've gone to the universities and I've talked. I- I've been on panels. I've gone to high schools, I've gone to my great grand kids uh.. Kindergart- Kindergarten classes. I've gone to- I try and go to all the schools in the city wherever I live. I work with the seniors and I talk with them, and uh.. uh.. a lot of them don't know what went on, and uh.. we just had in our- in our town, Steven's Point and it's 35,000 I think we only got a couple of Pearl Harbor survivors there. One of them just died a short time ago that I- that I played golf with, and uh.. he had cancer and he died about a year ago. And uh.. we had- we got another friend of mine, Fred, was at Scofield [ph?] Barracks and uh.. I don't know why he doesn't belong to the Survivor's Association or why he doesn't want to come back but uh.. uh.. I think that uh.. I'm great. I- I think it's great to get back with the guys and talk with them and to talk with you fellows today. It's- it's- it's an honor. I mean anyone that was there that survived it, it should be an honor. And I wear this hat proudly. I hope I do.

Q: And you honor us.

Will S. Lehner: Pardon?

Q: You honor us.

Will S. Lehner: Yeah? Well thank you.

Q: Thank you.

Q: Any final statements? How would you like Pearl Harbor to be remembered by Americans and by people in general?

Will S. Lehner: Uh.. I wish it would- could have been stayed as it was, Honolulu stayed as it was. When I was here in '40 we had two hotels. We had the Royal Hawaiian which is the pink one, the Al- the Alamo which was the white one, the pink and the white one. And uh.. now I came back here in '95 the first time I had been back since- since '42 and uh.. I tried to find the Royal Hawaiian and I had to go out on the beach. I was staying at the Hilton. I had to go out on the beach and walk along the beach in order to find it with the-

the other hotels had buried it out there. And uh.. uh.. it would be good if it could have been what we say the old days, "the good old days". I say the good old days, but technology and life goes on and uh.. sure, we had it a little tougher then I think, but I think we got along just as well. Uh.. I grew up in the Depression. We didn't have any money but we got along good. I don't think we had uh.. the crime then that we have now. We didn't have the dope that we have now. We didn't have the sh- the drive-by shootings that we have now. And that's why I say I wish the good old days. Aloha.

Q: Aloha. Thank you.

End of Tape 404 Will S. Lehner